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AUTHOR Cunningham, Michelle Doucette
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ABSTRACT

A poll of the attitudes of Connecticut citizens toward children in the state was commissioned by Kids 2000, a project of the Connecticut Association for Human Services, and was conducted by the Institute for Social Inquiry at the University of Connecticut as a telephone interview of 500 randomly selected adult residents. Questions asked covered such topics as trends in children's quality of life, the priority placed by the state on children's programs, willingness to pay more taxes for programs earmarked for children, state provision of child care, and provision of health care for pregnant women and children. All statistics indicated support on the part of the state's citizens for children's programs. The findings of this survey can be reduced to a single sentence: "Connecticut citizens across a broad spectrum are profoundly concerned about children and they are willing to invest more of their own money--through taxes--to help them." (EV)

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Children

A Survey of Public Attitudes

in

Toward Children in Our State

Connecticut

PS 024 024

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Michelle Doucette Cunningham

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What We Learned

The findings of this survey can be reduced to a single sentence:

Connecticut citizens across a broad spectrum are profoundly concerned about children and they are willing to invest more of their own money — through taxes — to help them.

The survey results clearly challenge the conventional wisdom that voters want lower taxes and smaller government across the board. Instead, Connecticut citizens favor government action to make children's lives better and they are ready to pay for it. They are frustrated with spending money on programs that don't work, and under-funding ones that do.

The most striking finding of our poll was how widespread the support for

children is in our state. Although there are modest differences among groups, this resounding support for children occurred across age, sex, party affiliation, income and education. It is strong whether or not the respondent has children younger than twenty. Women are slightly more likely to support children's issues than men. Republicans are somewhat less eager to put a high priority on children's issues than independents or Democrats. The sense that children's issues should have a high priority tends to decline slightly with age. Surprisingly, the support for children among parents (those with children under age twenty) was not substantially higher than it was among non-parents or those with adult children.

Public officials would do well to listen to the results of this survey.

Do you think the quality
of children's lives in Connecticut
has been getting better,
getting worse, or staying
about the same?

One of the common dreams we hold for our children is that they have better lives than their parents. Yet few of us think that children's lives are getting better. More than half of us (56%) said the quality of children's lives is getting worse, three in ten (29%) said it was staying the same, and only one in twelve (8%) felt there was improvement.

Only

8%

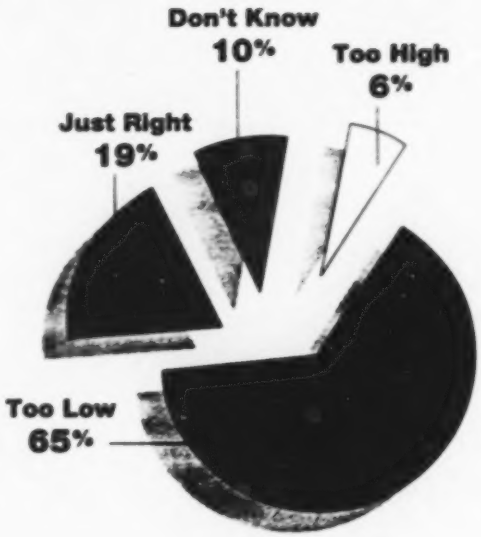
believe that the quality of children's lives is getting better

Two in three

think that Connecticut state government places too low a priority on programs for children

?

Do you think the Connecticut state government places too high a priority, too low a priority, or just the right priority on programs for children?



We value our children and hold them dear, yet we do not think that state government values them as much as we do. A resounding majority (65%) of those surveyed feel that the priority placed on children by Connecticut state government is too little and that our state leaders must do better. One in five (19%) feels the priority is about right, and only 6% think children's programs are given too high a priority. Connecticut citizens recognize the value of government programs and policies to help children, and they are ready to see more done to help them succeed.

81%

believe that government has a responsibility to make sure that all children have access to healthy food

Of those people who expressed an opinion,

half

would exempt kids' programs from the state spending cap if that were the only way to increase spending in this area

?

Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or strongly disagree that spending money on children's programs now will save money in the long run on things like job training, welfare and prisons?

We know that neglecting children today has serious consequences tomorrow, such as crime, unemployment, and welfare dependency. And we know that the costs of prevention are much cheaper than the costs of addressing more serious problems later. Connecticut residents overwhelmingly support investing in children now, for the payoff later — seven in eight (84%) people surveyed believe that "investing in children today saves us money in the long term on things like job training, welfare, and prisons."

84%

agree that spending money on children's programs is a good investment

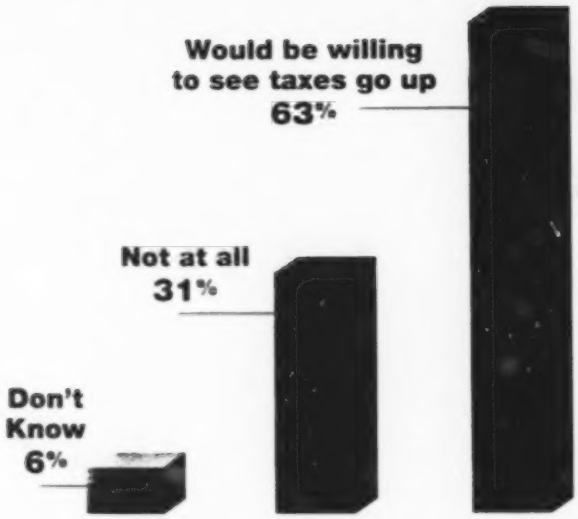
More than

six in ten

would be willing to pay higher taxes to help kids

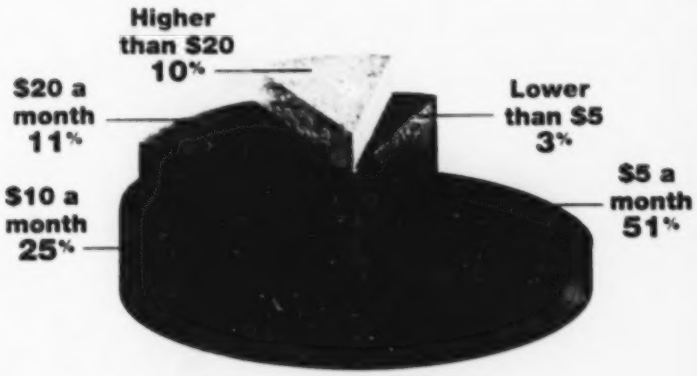
?

If the extra money was earmarked for programs for children such as early childhood education, health care and nutrition, would you be willing to see your own taxes go up five dollars a month, ten dollars a month, twenty dollars a month, or wouldn't you be willing to see your own state taxes increase at all?



If Connecticut state taxes were raised just $5 per month it would raise more than $100 million each year that could be invested in children. More than twice as many people (63% compared to 31%) said they would be willing to see their own taxes go up if the money were specifically spent to help children. Contrary to popular opinion, Connecticut citizens want government action to make children's lives better and they are ready to pay for it.

Of the 63% willing to see their taxes go up:



Two in three

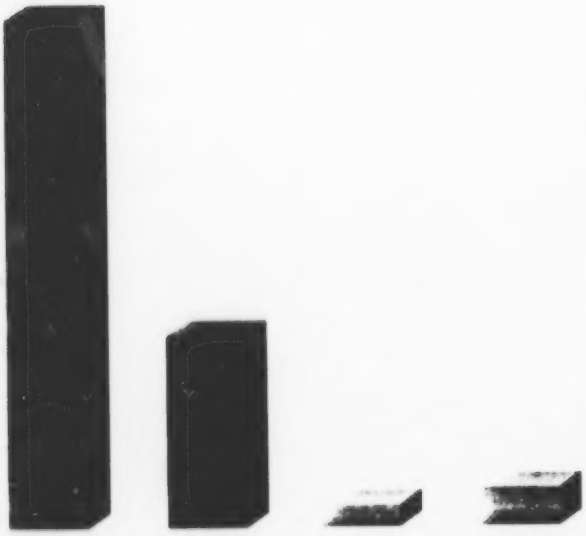
people think that every child who needs child care should get it

81%

favor putting uninsured pregnant women and children first in any health care reform initiative

?

Do you think the government should make sure there is affordable, safe child care for every child who needs it, even if it meant an increase in your own taxes?



Two in three

people think that every child who needs child care should get it

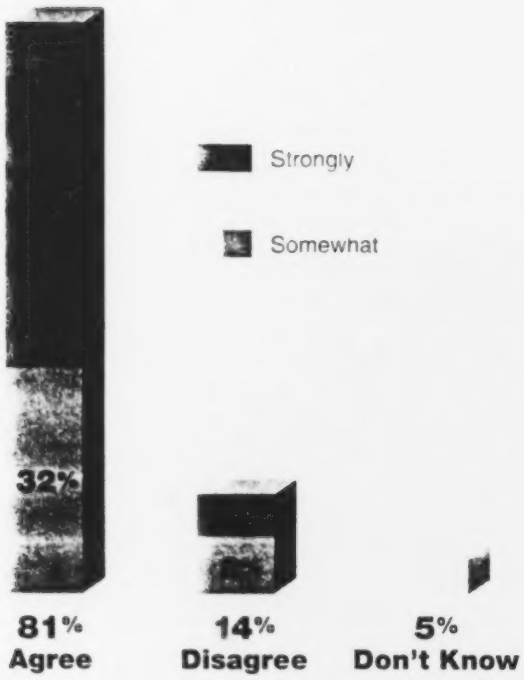
For most families with young children, child care is an economic necessity. But often the cost of care is beyond the reach of low- and moderate-income working parents. Many cannot afford services that will benefit their children and are forced to purchase unregulated care that often is unsafe and unreliable, compromising their children's future and the parents' ability to remain employed. Two-thirds (66%) of those surveyed think that child care is so essential that "the government should make sure there is affordable, safe child care for every child who needs it, even if it means an increase in . . . taxes." Equal support among parents and non-parents proves that child care is an important concern for all citizens.

81%

favor putting uninsured pregnant women and children first in any health care reform initiative

?

Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or strongly disagree that making sure children and pregnant women are adequately covered should be a top priority in any program of health care reform?



Preventive health care is important for ensuring children's health and development and identifying potential problems before they become acute. Yet because of a lack of health insurance many children and pregnant women do not see a doctor until an emergency arises and they have to go to the hospital. More than five times as many people agreed as disagreed that "children and pregnant women should be a top priority in any program of health care reform."

84%

agree that spending money on children's programs is a good investment

More than

six in ten

would be willing to pay higher taxes to help kids

?

Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or strongly disagree that government has a responsibility to make sure that all children have access to a good nutritious diet?

81%

believe that government has a responsibility to make sure that all children have access to healthy food

There is nothing that pulls at our heartstrings more than the sight of a hungry child. Yet this is not a problem only in third world countries — an estimated one in six Connecticut children are hungry or at risk of hunger. Children who are hungry have trouble learning and have problems with dizziness, unwanted weight loss, and more frequent colds, headaches and ear infections than other children. Four out of five (81%) people surveyed agreed that "government has a responsibility to make sure children have access to a good nutritious diet." Programs such as school breakfast and lunch, food stamps, and WIC (supplemental food for children and pregnant women) are critical ways in which the government helps to make sure that children eat right.

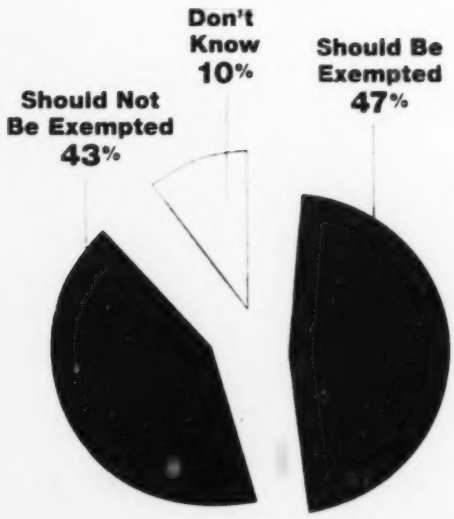
Of those people who expressed an opinion,

half

would exempt kids' programs from the state spending cap if that were the only way to increase spending in this area

?

In 1992, voters passed a spending cap, putting a limit on the amount the state can spend in any one year. Do you think that programs for children such as health care and early childhood education should be exempted from the total spending limit, if that were the only way to increase spending in this area?



When the state spending cap passed by a four to one margin, most leaders incorrectly assumed that the public wanted to see decreased spending in every area. The results of this poll suggest that the issue is more complicated — people don't want to see their hard-earned tax dollars wasted, but they see children's programs as a critical investment for the future. The percentage of those in favor of exempting kids' programs from the spending cap (if it were the only way to increase their funding) is roughly equal to those who think they should not be exempt.

Only

8%

believe that the quality of children's lives is getting better

Two in three

think that Connecticut state government places too low a priority on programs for children

Why We Conducted This Poll

The Connecticut Association for Human Services commissioned this poll in order to measure and better understand the attitudes of Connecticut citizens toward children in this state. It is important that leaders in government, business and civic organizations know what Connecticut people want for their children, and what they expect from their leaders.

Who We Surveyed

This survey was conducted by the highly respected Institute for Social Inquiry at the University of Connecticut. A total of 500 randomly selected adult residents of Connecticut were interviewed by telephone from October 20 to 25, 1994. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. The margin of error is +/- 5%.

The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) is an independent nonprofit research, public education and policy development organization committed to promoting the health and well-being of our state's residents — young and old alike. CAHS serves as a catalyst, working with diverse constituencies throughout the state to ensure the provision of human services that are of the highest quality, responsive to people's needs and cost-effective.

KIDS 2000 is a part of the national KIDS COUNT initiative funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Kids
2000

KIDS 2000, an initiative of CAHS,
collects the best available
data on children's well-being,
informs the public and state leaders about
the problems facing children and families,
and facilitates action on their behalf.

In April 1994, KIDS 2000 published
Connecticut's Children: Still At Risk,
a detailed look at how children are faring
in our state, including local-level data.
This will be supplemented each year by
annual updates of key indicators of
children's well-being.

For more information about how to
purchase these materials, please contact:

Connecticut Association for Human Services
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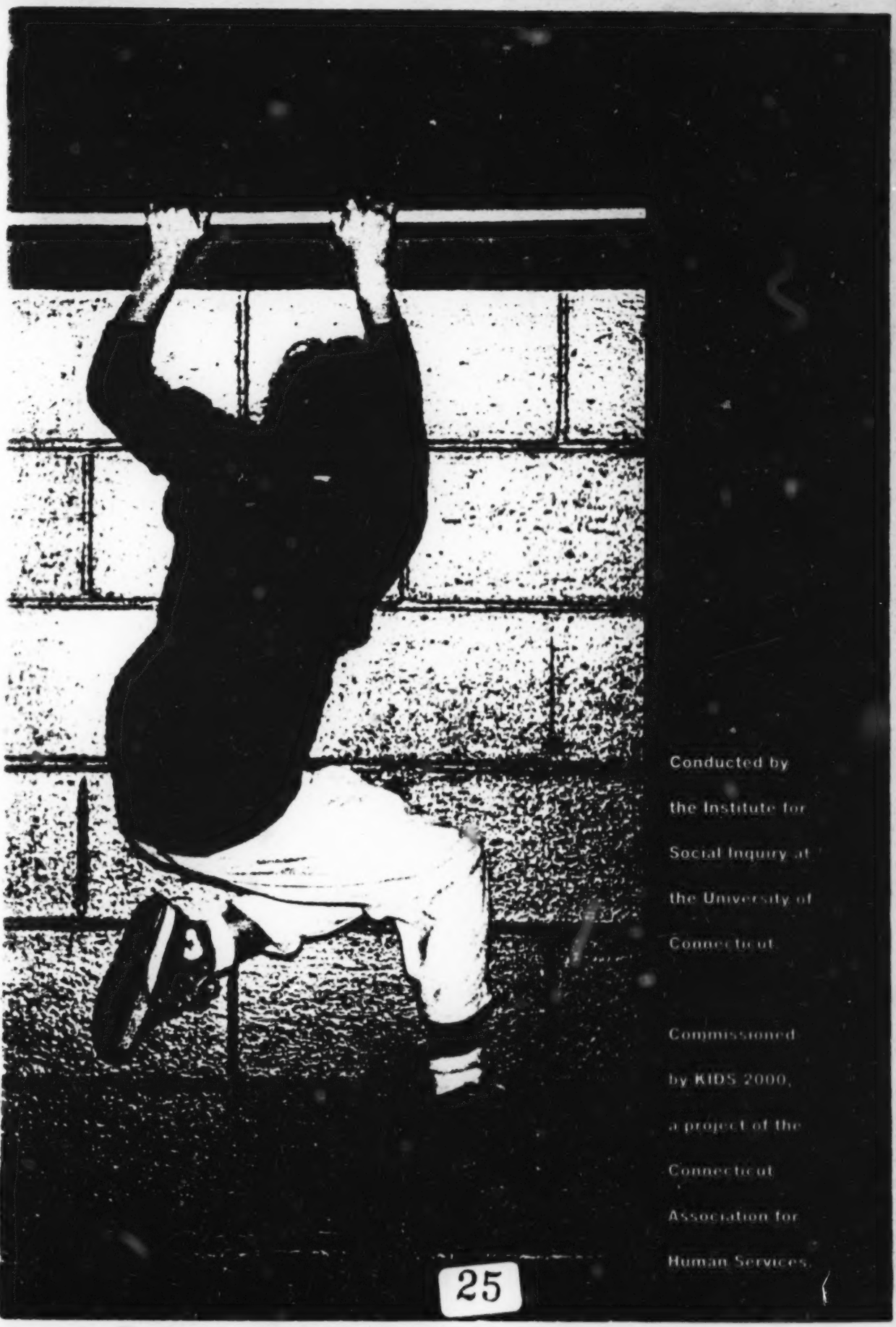
203-522-7762



Conducted by
the Institute for
Social Inquiry at
the University of
Connecticut

Commissioned
by KIDS 2000,
a project of the
Connecticut
Association for
Human Services

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Organization/Address: Connecticut Association for Human Svcs 110 Bartholomew Avenue, Suite 4030 Hartford, CT 06106-2201	Telephone: (860)951-2212 FAX: (860)951-6511 E-Mail Address: Date: 12/11/96